



David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition

Israel Finkelstein , Neil Asher Silberman

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There has been an explosion of recent discoveries in biblical archaeology. These finds have shed powerful light on figures and stories from the Bible -- and completely changed what we know about some of its most famous characters. The reputations of the first great kings, David and Solomon, evolved over hundreds of years. In *David and Solomon*, leading archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman focus on the two great leaders as a window into the entire biblical era. *David and Solomon* covers one thousand years of ancient civilization, separating fact from legend and proving that the roots of the western tradition lie very deep.

David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition Details

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From Reader Review David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition for online ebook

Matthew says

a more focused version of modern biblical archaeology findings concerning David and Solomon. thought-provoking and well argued.

Jonathan says

Finkelstein and Silberman - the Dynamic Duo of ancient Israel - take a realistic and refreshing look at what might have been the 'United Monarchy' of the early Iron Age II in the Land of Israel. While it is true that there is absolutely no archaeological evidence of a massive Davidic empire or gold, spices and peacocks from Sheba (or even the Queen), the reality is perhaps even more fascinating. A pair of tiny hill-country chiefdoms (Were Judah and Israel united? At this point, we just don't know) lay the basis for stories and legends that will live on through the millennia and founded the world's most influential and enduring philosophy: ethical monotheism. In some ways, it makes the 'adventures' of David and the 'wisdom' of Solomon more real and poignant. Perhaps what still draws us to these 3000 year-old kings is that they are depicted in the Tanakh as flesh and blood men, warts and all. And the stories about them are credible because they tend to match the actual conditions of Iron Age Israel, as it is manifested in the archaeological research. A great read for all you Bible and Israelite fans out there.

Ushan says

The Books of Samuel and Kings in the Bible give a list of kings (and one queen) of the Davidic dynasty, and the length of reign of each; the penultimate Judean king Jeconiah's release from the Babylonian captivity is also mentioned in Babylonian archives, which we can date, which makes it possible to date all the reigns, if we take the Biblical regnal lengths at face value. If we do this, then David and Solomon reigned in the 10th century BCE. It is entirely possible that a chieftain named David ruled over the tribe of Judah in the 10th century, extorting from the rich, protecting the common people, like an Iron Age Robin Hood, and serving as a mercenary for a Philistine lord. The society depicted in the Books of Samuel is consistent with the Amarna letters between Egypt and its colonial administrators in Canaan four centuries earlier. However, there are lots of problems with the rest of the David and Solomon story. It was Omri and Ahab of the Northern Kingdom of Israel who built a magnificent palace in Samaria, and not Solomon in Jerusalem. Assyrian archives and the Mesha stele say that it was the Omrides who conquered the countries that David was supposed to have conquered, and traded with the countries that Solomon was supposed to have traded with. There are many anachronisms in the David and Solomon stories. The weapons of Goliath do not look at all like the weapons of the Philistine warriors on Egyptian reliefs, but more like those of the 7th century Greek mercenaries in Egyptian service. The Hebrew word for a Philistine lord, *seren*, sounds like the Greek word *tyrannus*, which in turn is derived from a word in one of the languages of Asia Minor in the 7th century, not the 10th. The only Phoenician king Hiram known from sources other than the Bible lived centuries after Solomon, who was supposed to have traded with him. Finkelstein and Silberman suggest that the histories of David and

Solomon were written after Assyria conquered Israel and Judah was full of refugees from the north, and were intended to be the shared history of both peoples dominated by that of the southerners; as we would now say, it counteracted the attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Judah's interests. These stories were revisited in the Books of Chronicles, which were written after the return from Babylonian captivity, and whose authors wanted to define Judaism as a religion less associated with a particular kingdom, and differentiate the Jews from the Samaritans, who were the majority population of Israel that remained after the Assyrian deportations, and who had their own version of the Torah and their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Later still, both Jewish and Christian commentators allegorized and rewrote the David and Solomon stories to suit their own ends; David's seduction of Bathsheba was supposed to be an allegory of the Christian Church converting the pagans.

Andrew Lucas says

This book is a valuable exploration of the history of the two ancient entities, Israel and Judah, through the prism of archeology. It traces the development of traditions related to kings David and Solomon in the Hebrew Bible, posing viable paradigms for that development in the light of archaeological discoveries. It is written in a highly accessible manner for the lay reader. A valuable companion to their earlier work, 'The Bible Unearthed'.

Richard Zwama says

This is really a great book! Finally a scientific explanation of the history about David and Solomon based on archeological facts. It gave me a total different view on the way history was written down in antiquity. You will discover the reasons why the Bible says the things it says.

Justin Tapp says

The maps in this book (Kindle edition) are inadequate. I recommend investing in a better map to keep handy on your table or better yet on your wall.

If you want a brief summary of this book's contents, read Israel Finkelstein's "A Low Chronology Update: Archaeology, History and Bible", in T. E. Levy – T. Higham (eds.), *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating: Archaeology, Text and Science* (London: Equinox, 2005) 31-42, available for free download at academia.edu. I recommend that with a word of caution to the reader: Finkelstein addresses valid criticisms (naming them as valid) to his hypothesis in this article, including a criticism by Eilat Mazar, which the authors do not do in the book. There is constantly new archaeology being uncovered in the Levant that both support and undermine various hypotheses, and new hypotheses are always being generated. As the authors admit, there are many competing claims, even among archeologists working on the same digs. The authors don't assign probabilities. Again, a weakness of the book is that the authors do not lay out counterarguments to their preferred hypotheses in this book. There have since been recent discoveries that may alter the hypothesis (from 2006) a bit, or make it less probable, see below.

The basic hypothesis of the authors is this: There was never a united monarchy under David and Solomon, the idea was developed two centuries later to legitimize Judah's rule over Israeli refugees after the northern

kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians. 1-2 Samuel represents a blending of Northern Kingdom and Judahite history, in which Judah comes out on top and Judah's rule is legitimized because of Saul's sinful follies; David is shown as merciful to Saul's lineage as well as married to it in order to quell any resentment. David was an actual 10th century highland chieftan/bandit, and the evidence for his actual existence include the fact that the Scripture uses Hebrew language and geography that can only be dated to the 10th century, and would have been unknown if scribes were making it up in the 6th century or later. The Tel Dan stela confirms his historic existence and importance remaining centuries later. But there are "clues" in the text that the final redaction of 1-2 Samuel reflects 8th and 7th century realities. Goliath, for example, resembles a Greek hoplite and looks nothing as Philistine warriors are depicted in Egyptian sketches. Likewise, the character of David in 2 Samuel seems patterned after Hezekiah. Solomon is patterned either after the wise Assyrian and Persian kings and reflect an economy that could only have existed in the 8th and 7th centuries when Judah grew rich as an Assyrian vassal state, or Solomon is patterned after Manasseh who led an economic revival after Sennacherib had besieged and appropriated some of Judah. There is no archaeological evidence for a growing Jerusalem or Judah in the 10th-9th centuries. Structures previously believed to be Solomon's stables and other large works comporting with 1 Kings have since been widely dated later. Villages in Judah become much more populated, according to carbon dating and other methods, in the 8th century after refugees move from the Northern Kingdom. You need a "low chronology," move the traditional dates of Judahite expansion up at least a century, to explain the differences.

The authors contend that most of the archaeological work in Israel in the 19th and 20th centuries use the Bible as their starting point, which leads to circular logic about dates for the sights found. By ignoring the biblical chronology and finding corresponding events in Egyptian and Assyrian history, along with carbon dating and what is physically available from digs, you can date the growth of Judah's kingdom a couple centuries later. Their views roughly line up with biblical commentator Kyle McCarter, Jr. who sees 1-2 Samuel as mainly a political history. But their own exegesis is lacking a bit; another weakness of the book is that, interestingly, the authors do not mention the origins or the nature of the Deuteronomistic History recorded in Scripture. 1-2 Samuel is a notoriously difficult book to translate because the Masoretic text is missing several elements included in the Septuagint, which came much later, and not all of the Dead Sea Scrolls containing portions of the books have been released or studied yet. (I found this out by reading some excellent commentaries dealing with textual difficulties of certain chapters and Hebrew words. 1 Samuel 13:1, for example, is notoriously incomplete and untranslatable).

Why this is important:

Historical David is just as important to Christology as Historical Adam. The covenant God makes with David in 2 Samuel 7 is a "revelation for mankind" about the "distant future," fulfilled in Jesus--the branch from the root of Jesse--who is called "Son of David" (Matthew 1:1, 9:27, etc.). It is a continuation of the Adamic-Noahic-Abrahamic-Mosaic covenant which all point to a coming Messiah who will reign forever. Jesus also becomes the fulfillment of Solomon's temple, he is the "tabernacle" (John 1:14, John 2:19), and Christians (the Church) today are the same fulfillment as the Holy Spirit fills us just as it did the tabernacle of Exodus and Solomon's temple of 1 Kings (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19-20, 2 Cor. 6:16, 1 Peter 2, etc.).

Recent discoveries that might affect the authors' (2006) work:

1. Literacy in Israel may have been more widespread earlier than previously thought, from new analysis (2016) by Tel Aviv University on the Arad ostraca. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/new-look...>).

While the authors maintain that "there is no sign of extensive literacy or writing in Judah until the end of the eighth century BCE" (p. 88),

"we can now say that the tale could not possibly have been put in writing until more than two hundred years after the death of David" (p. 36)- this does not appear to be necessarily true in light of recent evidence. I believe these recent discoveries undermine their hypothesis that Judah re-wrote the 10th century history of

Judah and Israel during the 7th century as it would simply be harder to get away with with a population that was somewhat literate-- it's more plausible in light of new evidence that there surely would have been both oral AND written memories by which Israelites would know that David had never been a ruler over a united Northern and Southern Kingdom if that were indeed the case. In other words, even with a Low Chronology, you can move literacy up a century or so.

2. Another reviewer cites evidence by Barry Strauss of 13th and 12th century BC Egyptian paintings of Greek warriors possible akin to Goliath. The authors claim that Goliath's armor could only be described as that of a Greek hoplite not present in 10th century Jewish thinking. Apparently, Egyptian paintings of the "Sea People" Philistines do not look as Goliath is described. Hence, one could conclude that perhaps such warriors did exist, or that Goliath's description could have been a preserved description of an exotic Heroic Age Greek warrior.

3. Dr. Eilat Mazar discovered structures from 2005-2010 that she dates to the 10th century that would indicate both widespread literacy and the ability to do large-scale construction in Jerusalem at a time the authors say would have been impossible. Her discoveries of a large wall structure and pottery in 2010 came after this book was published. (<http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Jlem-city...>) Part of her work uncovered the largest jars yet recovered in Jerusalem, whereas when this book was written there were scarce any shards from the 10th century known to be found, according to the authors. In the book, Finkelstein contests the Large Stone Structure that Mazar found in 2005. But Mazar continues to get university funding and be considered credible; in 2015, Mazar's team uncovered a seal impression of King Hezekiah in an ancient refuse dump. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases...>

So, while the authors debate Mazar's claims, she at least appears to be uncovering interesting things and is still unapologetic about the dates she gives matching a biblical timeline. Finkelstein's "Low Chronology Update" article addresses Mazar, but also does not disparage her work as commenters on Amazon do and also includes hers in his list of "valid" criticisms.

However, the authors are rather conservative in their view on when it was written. As cited above, they do NOT say the entire Saul-David-Solomon story was made up whole-cloth after the exile by scribes who fooled an illiterate population. They deny more critical claims that the Deuteronomistic History was written entirely after the Babylonian exile because of the geography and the Hebrew used:

"First of all, the evidence of literacy and extensive scribal activity in Jerusalem in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods was hardly greater—in fact much smaller—than that relating to the eighth (century)...To assume, as the minimalists do, that in the fifth or fourth or even second century BCE, the scribes of a small, out-of-the-way temple town in the Judean mountains compiled an extraordinarily long and detailed composition about the history, personalities, and events of an imaginary Iron Age “Israel” without using ancient sources was itself taking an enormous leap of faith" (p. 254).

The geographical background of the stories of David in 1 Samuel matches the 10th century, not the 8th or later (p. 41).

"This combination of peoples and areas on both sides of the Jordan River does not correspond to any later territorial unit in the history of Israel. Indeed the biblical description of Saul's territorial legacy does not apply the geographic terms used for these regions in late monarchic times" (p. 70)

The Tel Dan stele of David discovered in 1996 fatally damaged the whole-cloth "minimalist" hypotheses.

The borders of Judah-Israel do indeed match the historical/archaeologic record in the mid ninth century, contrary to the claims of the minimalist school (p. 112).

Onto David:

David's life during his flight from Saul seems to match that of the 10th century "Apiru" people mentioned in the Egyptian "Amarna letters," which describe isolated herders and highlander bandit-kings who operated apart from Egyptian control. ("This term, sometimes transliterated as Habiru, was once thought to be related to the term 'Hebrews,' but the Egyptian texts make it clear that it does not refer to a specific ethnic group so much as a problematic socioeconomic class," p.48). 1 Samuel 30:26-31 records that David shared his captured Philistine booty with local highland elders, and describes his marriage relationship with their daughters as well. So, the authors rate this aspect of David's life as "plausible."

Northern Kingdom expansion:

"From only about twenty-five recorded sites in the area between Jerusalem and the Jezreel Valley in the preceding Late Bronze Age, the number skyrockets to more than 230 in the late Iron I period. Their estimated population was just over forty thousand, compared to less than five thousand in the entire hill country of Judah. A similarly dramatic settlement expansion took place across the Jordan, in the northern part of the Transjordanian plateau. There, too, the number of settled sites vastly expanded, from about thirty in the Late Bronze Age to about 220 in the Early Iron Age" (p. 70-71). The authors don't mention it, but it roughly matches the census numbers given in the battles of the Book of Judges; Judah's military offering was petty compared to the rest of Israel.

Shehonq I / Shishak- pharaoh of 22nd Dynasty who ruled in the 10th century. The Bible puts Shishak's battle against Israel around 926 BCE during Rehoboam's reign, but Egypt's list of conquered cities only records the Northern Kingdom sites and nothing in Jerusalem and Judah. If Judah had risen to prominence under Solomon, why aren't its cities even mentioned in the Egyptian history?

"The archaeological evidence suggests that (Sishak's invasion) actually happened: the places just to the north of Jerusalem that appear on the Karnak list (and that the biblical tradition describes as the core of Saul's activity) were the scene of a significant wave of abandonment in the tenth century BCE. The conclusion seems clear: Sheshonq and his forces marched into the hill country and attacked the early north Israelite entity. He also conquered the most important lowland cities like Megiddo and regained control of the southern trade routes" (p. 83).

"new analyses of the archaeological data from Jerusalem have shown that the settlement of the tenth century BCE was no more than a small, poor highland village, with no evidence for monumental construction of any kind" (p. 82).

"Over a century of excavations in the City of David (within the confines of Jerusalem) have produced surprisingly meager remains from the late sixteenth to mid-eighth centuries BCE" (p. 95).

"As far as we know from the silence of historical sources and archaeological evidence, Judah—with only limited resources and set off from the major trade routes—remained a remote and primitive highland kingdom throughout the ninth and early eighth centuries BCE. It evaded even indirect Assyrian control," (p. 124).

But the Amalekites and Philistines, not the Egyptians, are the chief biblical enemy during Saul and David's day. How does one explain this?

"The coastal Sea Peoples, including Philistines, had long served as Egyptian mercenary forces, and their role as Egyptian allies in this campaign and its aftermath seems quite plausible. It is possible that the Bible's reference to the Philistines attacking the hill country and establishing garrisons at Geba (1 Samuel 13:3) and Bethlehem (2 Samuel 23:14), and to the great Philistine-Israelite battle at Beth-shean, may, in fact, preserve a memory of the Egypto-Philistine alliance" (p. 86).

Here's the key:

"David and Judah may have benefited from the fall of the northern polity and expanded to control some of the highland territories that Saul once led" (p. 86).

"The wave of destruction that had previously been dated to around 1000 BCE and attributed to the expansion of the united monarchy in the days of King David actually came later, by almost a century. Such a transformation can indeed be traced in the archaeological record, but as we will suggest, it occurred first in the northern highlands rather than Judah—and only with the passage of several generations after the presumed reigns of both David and Solomon" (p. 98-99).

The authors' hypothesis is that the united monarchy occurred under the Omride dynasty of the North, after historical David and Solomon; its capital was Samaria. The history was later revised after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (721 BC), as Judah's King Hezekiah benefited by being a vassal state to Assyria.

"The 'Court History' of David thus offers a whole series of historical retrojections in which the founder of the dynasty of Judah in the tenth century is credited with the victories and the acquisitions of territory that were in fact accomplished by the ninth-century Omrides" (p. 113).

The intrigue and even positions of "scribes" and "recorders" recorded in 2 Samuel were too sophisticated to have existed until a generation or two after Solomon, in the 9th century. Hence, it is retelling Omride history. The Philistine's attributes as described in 2 Samuel resemble more the time of Josiah, centuries later, than the 10th century (p. 184). The list of cities that David distributes booty to in 1 Samuel 30 "were especially prominent in the time of Josiah" (p. 188).

After the sack of Samaria, Judah's King Ahaz swore allegiance to Assyria (2 Kings 16:5-9). Sargon II finished the job of plundering Assyria and deporting many inhabitants. The authors record that Judah swelled at this time, likely taking on Israeli refugees. Ahaz was succeeded by Hezekiah, and Sargon II by Sennacherib during this period. The authors note that the history of Israel and Judah had to be altered at this time to explain and justify Judah's continual rule over the populous Northern tribes. Hezekiah took on the building projects ascribed to David and Solomon. "Jerusalem grew from a modest hill country town of about ten to fifteen acres to a large, fortified city of almost 150 acres. Jerusalem's population skyrocketed from around one thousand inhabitants to approximately twelve thousand" (p. 128).

"The archaeological picture of Judah in the closing decades of the eighth century is of a populous, prosperous, and literate kingdom. Jerusalem had become a heavily fortified city with a large population and a special class of royal officials, scribes, and administrators, who could conscript workmen for public projects and private memorials...the biblical account of David's rise and Solomon's succession could not have been written earlier than the late eighth century BCE" (p. 132).

Archaeology confirms an abandoning of many of the settlements in the Northern Kingdom during this time. The evidence suggests that the area around Bethel, near Judah, was where the migration was heaviest. The Northern refugees brought their Saul stories with them. "Perhaps as much as half of the Judahite population in the late eighth to early seventh century BCE was of north Israelite origin" (p. 136). "The finds at Arad, Beer-sheva, and Lachish seem to point to a similar picture: all three present evidence for the existence of sanctuaries in the eighth century BCE, but in all three, the sanctuaries fell into disuse before the end of the eighth century. It is noteworthy that none of the many seventh- and early-sixth-century BCE sites excavated in Judah produced evidence for the existence of a sanctuary" (p. 138).

2 Kings 18:4-5 (not 1 Kings, typo in the book) suggest to the authors that Hezekiah was taking his reforms to consolidate power in Jerusalem, making it the locus of legitimate worship. "In short, the cult 'reform' in the days of Hezekiah, rather than representing puritan religious fervor, was actually a domestic political

endeavor. It was an important step in the remaking of Judah in a time of a demographic upheaval" (p. 139). The re-writing of history to make it sound like they had once been united under David-- who God had chosen to supplant Saul-- took place around this time. "the earliest version of the biblical story of Saul, David, and the accession of Solomon—and possibly also his construction of the Temple—was created not solely or even primarily for religious purposes, but for a now-forgotten political necessity—of establishing Temple and Dynasty as the twin foundation stones for the new idea" (p. 143).

One "clue" given as support of the authors' hypothesis is in the confusing seige of Assyria against Jerusalem in 701 BC. The Bible records that Hezekiah both payed a tribute to relieve the seige, but then the Bible states that Jerusalem was miraculously delivered; these texts are difficult to reconcile, some scholars assume two different sieges. But the Assyrian prism that records the battle (701 BC), in propoganda form, recalls the seige, but not loss, simply saying that Sennacherib returns to Ninevah and receives tribute. (It is plausible that mass disease or something ravaged his camp as the Bible suggests as the prism does not record a successful conquering of Jerusalem as other cities). But Assyrian records also record that Hezekiah had lost some of the most fertile lands in the Shephelah, further crippling Judah (p. 146). Assyrian records do record the death of Sennacherib at the hands of his sons (681 BC), as the prophets had forecast.

3 stars out of 5... see my blog for full review.

Bob Breckwoldt says

A well written, easy to follow account of David and Solomon and what according to Finkelstein we know of them. By which he means little, but not nothing (he is no minimalist). What we know is very different from the account in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. All being of a later date and including much that archaeologically relates to over a 100 years later (advocated by the dating that comes from the argument for low chronology) and therefore reflects life not when David and Solomon were around but from the time of the Omrides. How persuasive it all is is a matter of debate, but the book is written with gusto, enthusiasm and enough notes for you to be able to appreciate the wider spectrum of opinion on the issues raised. A good read.

Louise says

The authors have put together research from a variety of disciplines to explore the Biblical stories of David and Solomon. They clearly present their findings.

While I was aware that the stories were spread over a number of books, I was not aware that the presentation changed. I presume that the story I learned in Sunday School was the one in Chronicles.

Like the Biblical record of Jesus, the records of David and Solomon were written at minimum 100 years after the events. I had never thought to question "why" they were written. The authors suggest that texts were written to elevate the Davidic successors, or Judah. If this is so, the intended audience would have a cultural ethic that would admire the cave living Robin Hood/bandit, the keeping of wives and concubines, the story of Bathsheba and her husband's fate. These are hardly the values of today's Judeo-Christian ethic.

The book discusses the influence of David and Solomon on art and on governmental theories. It's a stretch to

say that this book "traces" them, which I believe would require a separate book (or multi-volume set). I think the material given on this is just enough for the scope of this volume.

The power of this book is its citation of the Biblical text, side by side with maps and research findings. Each chapter begins with a chart capsulizing the story, the historical period and the archeological findings. This clearly tells the reader what will be developed in the chapter, and the promise is fulfilled.

The writers and the book designers are in synch, (so often books are rushed and maps appear pages beyond their narrative) and very clear maps and tables appear along side the narrative they illustrate.

One area that the author's present without comment is that the Queen of Sheba is from Yemen. If you ask, most American Blacks will tell you she was from Ethiopia. (The eastern most part of this African region is separated from Yemen by a narrow straight.) Researchers who have ignored the oral traditions of Thomas Jefferson's progeny have had to deal with recent DNA testing. Has forensic research verified the location of Sheba in Yemen?

This was an excellent book. It's brings together the work of thousands of people from many disciplines. I hope in a few years there is a update.

Lee Harmon says

A Finkelstein book will be controversial; let's establish that up front. And because there exists very literal archaeological evidence outside the Bible story of Judah's first kings, speculation will be a natural result of any such study. We know absolutely nothing from history about Saul and precious little about David and Solomon; in fact, the evidence is so sparse that a few scholars still doubt the existence of all three.

Finkelstein and Silberman don't doubt, but neither are they able to provide 342 pages of historical analysis. Instead, they trace the legends of these early kings through a thousand years of Hebrew writings, both in and out of the Bible. The earliest folklore and Bible verses about David show him as a bandit leader of a small gang of traveling raiders. Later authors portrayed David as a poet and a founder of a great dynasty, as well as a sinner. Solomon's reputation, as well, grew over time into a shrewd trader and wise sage.

How many of these writings are based on fact, and how many on legend? The authors' scholarly research and field experience will make you reconsider.

Sharkcrow says

Have read bits and pieces, will go back and read the whole thing when I have time - fascinating reading.

Dariusz P?ochocki says

Czasem mam wra?enie, ?e autor nie do ko?ca stosuje si? do zasad przytaczanych w pocz?tkach dzie?a, ?e brak dowod?w jednak nie do ko?ca jest najlepszym dowodem. Dobre szczeg?ólnie ostatnie rozdzia?y. Mimo

Steven Williams says

This book weaves a story from biblical text, historical information, and archaeological exploration. The story they tell begins in David's time and continues into Solomon's. Then, after this supposed united monarchy, the authors cover Israel's and Judah's dealings with the Assyrians. Afterwards comes Babylonia's dealings with Judah and the exilic period. Finally, comes the return to Judea of some of the exiles. Also covered is how the stories continued to be developed and be interpreted from Hellenistic times to the Middle Ages to early and modern Europe.

The authors also provide seven appendixes containing various details of some archaeological findings, one of which combats the minimalists view of the Bible that it contains no adequate view of history. In their opinion the minimalists are wrong, but that does not mean that everything in the Bible is historically correct. While they do not say so, I think that they still discount a lot of biblical history.

Some of the authors conclusions are that David and Solomon were probably real historical persons, not mythical, but that they never ruled over a large area, but were confined to Jerusalem and its environs; as Israel's refugees drift into Judah where stories from both kingdoms were mixed together began to be collected and written down, although not in final form; the Assyrian records confirm some of the kings in the Bible; the final biblical text was revamped at the time of exile and probably set by the time of Israel's brief independence between the Greek and Roman empires; and that the biblical stories of David and Solomon continued and are continuing to influence how people imagine kingship should be.

As far as the authors view on minimalism is concerned, they may be right that there is nonbiblical sources for the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, but are they enough to value the Bible as an historical text? I do not think so. The actual historical and archaeological support only confirms a very small part of the biblical text. Much of the stories are fabricated with a smidgen of reality, none of which can be verified. Granted their explanation that David's bandits days stories are confirmed by the towns then in existence, but no longer were after David's hypothesized period, it still offers little evidence that a historical David actually existed. The "House of David" reference in the historical record does not mean he existed. It only means that David was a name assigned to a person, real or not. So I feel the minimalists are pretty much on target, even if some of the more extreme scholars are not one hundred percent correct.

I thought the way the authors weaved together their sources to bring a coherent picture of what was the lay of land, both so to speak and literally was good. Their storyline is plausible in the whole, if not in every particular. They are both accomplished explainers, and their prose flows nicely. So I give it a very good rating.

I could recommend this book to anyone interested in what archaeology does and does not confirm of the biblical accounts, especially in connection to the David and Solomon stories. For stories they ultimately are. Even if you could rely on the historicalness of the Bible, which you cannot, history is all about telling stories, it just that some are nearer to the truth than others.

Dave says

The authors (both archaeologists, Bible scholars and, incidentally, religious Jews) explain the context in which the Old Testament's Deuteronomistic History came to be compiled.

The Deuteronomistic History is understood as comprising the Old Testament 'historical' books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. It started off as 10th century BCE collections of already-ancient myths, folklore and ballads; these oral legends were probably first compiled around the late 8th century BCE by royal spin doctors into a glorious national epic (i.e. political propaganda!) for Hezekiah; a century later it was extensively edited to justify Josiah's religious reforms; then between the 6th to 4th centuries BCE it underwent further extensive alterations to satisfy changing political needs (i.e. to explain the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the consequent Babylonian exile); and finally the period between the 3rd century BCE to the 5th century CE saw the addition of material with messianic overtones as the Jews craved freedom from foreign overlords.

This is a superb book, comprehensively argued and exhaustively referenced.

Alecia Hansen says

Superbly written. Controversial to say the least. If, however, the reader can break away from Hebrew tradition enough to examine the text with an open mind they will be in for an examination of how the Davidic times can be placed within a historicity view. I truly enjoyed the read. Warning though if you examine ancient Israel with a largely biblically based structure this book may be controversial.

Ahmed says

Another great book from professor finkelstein
